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Regan says staff recommended science board firings

BY ALEX GUILLÉN, ANNIE SNIDER | 04/15/2021 01:50 PM EDT

EPA Administrator Michael Regan said his controversial decision to fire all the members of two key scientific advisory panels was driven by recommendations from his staff.

“This is about listening to and learning from our staff and this was a staff recommendation that the boards needed to be reset,” Regan told reporters after a water infrastructure event in Washington, D.C. Thursday morning.

Context: Regan last month took the unprecedented move of [firing every member](#) of the agency’s Science Advisory Board and Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee, arguing that the bodies needed to be “reset” after the Trump administration increased the share of members from industry backgrounds and barred scientists who receive grant funding from EPA from serving on the boards. The latter decision was later struck down by several courts.

Speaking Thursday, Regan said the membership of the boards was “out of balance,” and the problem was not “the individuals that were in the seats, but more so [that] the collective seats were not representative of the needs that the agency has.”

Outside experts had suggested ways of “rebalancing” the boards by [less drastic means](#), such as by adding additional members from academia and rotating other members off as their terms expire. But Regan said the recommendation to eliminate all current members and reconstitute them from scratch came “collectively” from the staff.

“We came in and listened to all the staff. We’re listening to all of our staff and involving them in all of our decisions moving forward,” he said.

Regan’s move has drawn fierce criticism from Republicans, who say it is Biden’s EPA, not Trump’s, that is politicizing science at EPA. Two House Republicans earlier this month [said the move](#) “raises serious concerns about the politicization of the EPA.” And West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey [this week argued Regan’s move](#) “calls [the boards’] future objectivity into question” in a letter to Regan.

PFAS: Regan also indicated Thursday that he is open to the possibility of taking a class-based approach to regulating toxic “forever chemicals.”

“We’re taking a look at every option that we have as far as how we think about these pollutants as a family, as a class, and what our public health officials are advising us to do in terms of the level of threat that we believe this pollutant or contaminant may cause public health,” Regan said in response to reporter questions.

“We’re spending time talking with our staff and the experts in terms of what is the best way to approach this and what is our statutory authority that we can use to protect public health?” he said.

Some environmental groups have pushed for EPA to set a single drinking water limit for all PFAS and issue other regulations that address all PFAS, collectively. They say setting chemical-by-chemical limits can’t be done in a timely manner, and would fail to account for the cumulative impact that the chemicals, which often occur together, have on people’s bodies.

But chemicals manufacturers say different PFAS can pose significantly different health risks and should be addressed individually.

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